

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD GOOFS

(the rest of Will Shortz's Crossword Goofs will run in a future issue)

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It would be wonderful to declare that as crossword editor I never let an error get into a published puzzle in the New York Times.

Wonderful, but, sadly, not true.

Despite careful checking of every puzzle, and testing and rechecking by a crack backup team (currently six people — Frank Longo, Nancy Schuster, David Rosen, Evie Eysenburg, Ellen Ripstein, and Martin Herbach), sharp-eyed Times readers catch me in about a dozen mistakes a year. And they aren't bashful about letting me know.

In my defense I should say that most of the errors are small, with few noticed by more than one or two people. Also, I create more opportunities for errors by including lots of specific fact-based clues, rather than relying on the vaguer style of clue-writing prevalent in the old days. In addition, I vary the clues as much as possible, no matter how often the same answers appear, rather than repeating clues that are time-tested. In about 10% of the mistakes, the references I've relied on have themselves been in error.

As a whole the potential for goofs is vast. Each year the Times crossword contains about 32,000 clues and answers, most of which can go wrong in multiple ways.

Still, a mistake is a mistake. So herewith, on my 13th anniversary at the Times, is a full accounting of my flubs. Below are all the errors in the New York Times crossword since November 1993, omitting only typos and debatable points, as both an amusement to readers and a caution to other crossword editors and constructors not to repeat.

2006

Date: 11/24. *Clue:* Company that owns the brands Playtex, Kiwi and Hillshire Farm. *Answer:* SARA LEE. *Problem:* Sara Lee Corporation completed the spinoff of its apparel division, including Playtex, two months before this puzzle appeared.

Date: 8/19. *Clue:* Backup singers in a 1960's R&B group. *Answer:* THE MG'S. *Problem:* Booker T and the MG's were a strictly instrumental band.

Date: 6/15. *Clue:* Southpaw's hit. *Answer:* LEFT JAB. *Problem:* While a southpaw could conceivably jab with his left hand, by nature he'd jab with his right.

Date: 5/18. *Clue:* Camus's birthplace. *Answer:* ORAN. *Problem:* Albert Camus was born in the village of Mondovi, Algeria, on the other side of the country from Oran. His novel "The Plague" was set in Oran.

Date: 4/25. *Clue:* With 24-Across, well-known line of literature and film. *Answer:* ELEMENTARY [MY DEAR WATSON]. *Problem:* This line was said only in the Sherlock Holmes books, never in film.

Date: 4/23. *Clue:* Youngest QB to win a Super Bowl, at age 24. *Answer:* TOM BRADY. *Problem:* While Brady once held the record for the youngest QB to win a Super Bowl, his record was superseded by Ben Roethlisberger, 23, in the Super Bowl three months before this puzzle appeared.

Date: 4/11. *Clue:* Most G.I.'s: Abbr. *Answer:* P.V.T.S. *Problem:* Only a small percentage of G.I.'s are privates. The clue should have said "some" rather than "most."

Date: 4/1. *Clue:* ____-Ude, Mongolia. *Answer:* ULAN. *Problem:* The city of Ulan-Ude is in southern Russia.

Date: 2/19. *Clue:* Afternoon hour in Italy. *Answer:* UNO. *Problem:* Time, in Italian, is feminine, so the afternoon hour is "una."

Date: 1/14. *Clue:* Beau's belle. *Answer:* CHERI. *Problem:* Since the French word "cheri" is masculine, the clue should have been "Belle's beau."

2005

Date: 10/17. *Clue:* It fits into a nut. *Answer:* SCREW. *Problem:* Typically it's a bolt that fits into a nut, not a screw.

Date: 9/25 [Telescopes]. *Clue:* Writer/director of "Spartacus," 2004. *Answer:* MAMET. *Problem:* Mamet directed "Spartan," not "Spartacus."

Date: 7/31. *Clue:* Bean source. *Answer:* COCA. *Problem:* Coca plants have berries. It's cacao plants that have beans.

Date: 6/11. *Clue:* First of a railway trio. *Answer:* ACHESON. *Problem:* The famous railway is the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. Dean Acheson was Truman's secretary of state.

Date: 6/11. *Clue:* Famed F.B.I. figure. *Answer:* NESS. *Problem:* Eliot Ness was an agent for the Treasury department.

Date: 5/25. *Clue:* Dutch ____ (uncommon sights nowadays). *Answer:* ELMS. *Problem:* It's the disease that's Dutch, not the elms.

Date: 5/2. *Clue:* Scratch-off ticket game. *Answer:* LOTTO. *Problem:* Lotto is a betting game of choosing numbers; it doesn't involve scratching off tickets.

Date: 4/7. *Clue:* Tubular food. *Answer:* SALAMI. *Problem:* Salami isn't hollow, so it's can't be tubular. It could be properly described as cylindrical.

Date: 3/20. *Clue:* First Labor P.M. to win consecutive terms. *Answer:* BLAIR. *Problem:* Both Clement Attlee (1945 and 1950) and Harold Wilson (1964 and 1966) won back-to-back elections for British P.M. — although neither served two full terms.

Date: 2/24. *Clue:* University of Ohio athlete. *Answer:* BOBCAT. *Problem:* There is no University of Ohio. The Bobcats play for Ohio University.

Date: 2/20. Clue: Chopin's "Raindrop" and "Butterfly," e.g. Answer: ETUDES. Problem: "Raindrop" is a prelude, not an étude.

Date: 2/6 [Acrostic]. Clue: Mark Twain's hometown on the Missouri. Answer: HANNIBAL. Problem: While Twain's home was in the state of Missouri, it was on the Mississippi.

*Date: 2/2. Clue: Pierce portrayer on TV and film. Answer: ALDA. Problem: Alan Alda played Hawkeye Pierce (of "M*A*S*H") only on TV. In the film the role was played by Donald Sutherland.*

2004

Date: 12/1. Clue: The length of a meter is based precisely on the amount of light emitted from this. Answer: KRYPTON ISOTOPE. Problem: The length of a meter was once based on the wavelength of a certain color of light (not the amount of light) emitted from a krypton isotope ... and even this standard no longer applies.

Date: 9/5. Clue: Where Douglas MacArthur returned, famously. Answer: BATAAN. Problem: When MacArthur withdrew from Bataan in 1942, famously declaring "I shall return," he was referring to the Philippines in general, not Bataan in particular. American troops retook Bataan in 1945, but MacArthur directed them from Leyte, and he never set foot on Bataan again.

Date: 9/2. Clue: Montreal university. Answer: LAVAL. Problem: Laval University is in Quebec City. The suburb of Montreal named Laval is unrelated.

Date: 8/20. Clue: Where drammi are performed. Answer: TEATROS. Problem: As "drammi" is Italian for "dramas," the clue suggests that the answer is Italian; but the Italian plural for "teatro" is "teatri." "Teatros" is strictly Spanish and Portuguese.

Date: 8/12. Clue: Pixar collectible. Answer: CEL. Problem: Pixar movies are created on computer, so they have no cels.

Date: 7/25. Clue: Foils. Answer: EPEES. Problem: An épée and a foil are distinct types of swords.

Date: 6/26. Clue: Figures in major-league baseball. Answer: SALARY CAPS. Problem: Professional football has salary caps, but major-league baseball, notably, doesn't.

Date: 5/27. Clue: His poem "Fleas" reads, in its entirety, "Adam / Had 'em" Answer: NASH. Problem: While this poem is widely attributed to Ogden Nash, it actually predates him.

Date: 4/22. Clue: Ammo belt accompanier. Answer: UZI. Problem: An Uzi's ammunition is in a magazine, not an ammo belt.

Date: 4/10. *Clue:* Hit series whose pilot was the TV movie "Panic at Malibu River."
Answer: BAYWATCH. *Problem:* The movie was titled "Panic at Malibu Pier."

Date: 3/28. *Clue:* The fox in Disney's "The Fox and the Hound." *Answer:* TODD. *Problem:* The fox's name is spelled Tod.

Date: 3/16. *Clue:* Ball that may hit an umpire. *Answer:* FOUL TIP. *Problem:* By definition, a foul tip is a ball that glances off the bat and goes directly into the catcher's mitt; so it cannot hit the umpire.

Date: 1/3. *Clue:* He's found in the Prado. *Answer:* DALI. *Problem:* The Spanish national art gallery deals in classical art and does not contain works by Salvador Dali.

2003

Date: 11/23 [Diagramless]. *Clue:* Defense secretary Powell. *Answer:* COLIN. *Problem:* Colin Powell was secretary of state.

Date: 10/22. *Clue:* Le petit prince's home planet. *Answer:* TERRE. *Problem:* Le petit prince, in the Saint-Exupéry story, was from an asteroid. He was on earth only temporarily, so "terre" was not his home planet.

Date: 9/21. *Clue:* Cartoon character whose debut film was "Golddiggers of '49." *Answer:* PORKY PIG. *Problem:* Although Porky Pig first achieved "fame" in "Golddiggers of '49," in 1936, his film debut was actually in the 1935 short "I Haven't Got a Hat."

Date: 9/4. *Clue:* "Raid on Entebbe" airline. *Answer:* EL AL. *Problem:* The airline whose passengers at Entebbe were rescued by Israeli commandos, as recounted in the movie "Raid on Entebbe," was Air France, not El Al.

Date: 8/29. *Clue:* "___ chance!" *Answer:* BON. *Problem:* French for "good luck" is "bonne chance."

Date: 8/1. *Clue:* Viagra, chemically. *Answer:* CITRATES. *Problem:* The clue should have been worded to be plural.

Date: 7/27. *Clue:* Former TV dog. *Answer:* REN. *Problem:* As of the puzzle's publication date, Ren and Stimpy were back on Nickelodeon.

Date: 6/22. *Clue:* Title cat in a 1980's cartoon film. *Answer:* MILO. *Problem:* "Milo & Otis" was a live-action film, not a cartoon.

Date: 5/20. *Clue:* 1960's baseball Hall-of-Famer Blue Moon _____. *Answer:* ODOM. *Problem:* While Blue Moon Odom was an All-Star, he was never elected to the Hall of Fame.

Date: 5/13. *Clue:* Heat to more than 212°, as water. *Answer:* BOIL. *Problem:* Water boils at 212°. It cannot be heated higher than that.

Date: 5/2. *Clue:* Physicist with an eponymous number. *Answer:* MACH. *Problem:* It's the physicist who's eponymous, not the number.

Date: 4/27. *Clue:* Right-triangle leg: Abbr. *Answer:* HYP. *Problem:* According to the dictionary, a "leg" is a side of a right triangle that is *not* the hypotenuse.

Date: 4/25. *Clue:* Host of NPR's "This American Life." *Answer:* IRA GLASS. *Problem:* "This American Life" is produced and distributed by PRI rather than NPR ... although many NPR stations carry the program.

Date: 3/16. *Clue:* Vacation place for Carlo. *Answer:* ISLA. *Problem:* "Isla" is Spanish and "Carlo" is Italian. An "isla" might be a vacation place for *Carlos*.

Date: 3/5. *Clue:* Black, as la nuit. *Answer:* NOIR. *Problem:* In French, "noir" is masculine and "nuit" is feminine. A correct clue would have been "Black, as un film."

Date: 3/1. *Clue:* Mate for "my friend" Flicka. *Answer:* MARE. *Problem:* The horse Flicka, from the Mary O'Hara stories, was a mare. Her mate was a stallion.

Date: 1/18. *Clue:* "___ uncertain actor on the stage" (Shakespearean sonnet start). *Answer:* AS AN. *Problem:* The correct word before "actor" is "unperfect," not "uncertain."

2002

Date: 12/7. *Clue:* Traitorous leader of occupied France in W.W. II. *Answer:* PÉTAIN. *Problem:* Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain was the chief of state of France's Vichy government (i.e., unoccupied France), not the northern part of the country controlled by the Nazis.

Date: 11/24. *Clue:* First name debuting on Broadway, 1951. *Answer:* YUL. *Problem:* While Yul Brynner did open in "The King and I" in 1951, he had previously starred in "Lute Song" in 1946.

Date: 9/29. *Clue:* The Prince of Tides. *Answer:* TOM WINGO. *Problem:* While Tom Wingo was the lead character in "The Prince of Tides," this nickname actually applied to someone else in the book.

Date: 9/22. *Clue:* Cocaine, for one. *Answer:* OPIATE. *Problem:* An opiate is a sedative, while cocaine is the opposite.

Date: 8/21. *Clue:* Brother of Larry and Curly. *Answer:* MOE. *Problem:* Larry was not a real brother of Curly and Moe. However, the Three Stooges did play brothers in several movies, and they all declared themselves "brothers" in the Local Amalgamation of Morons, so the clue had basis at least in fiction.